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THE CAESAREAN IMPRISONMENT OF PAUL¹

PROFESSOR CHARLES B. WILLIAMS, PH.D.
Southwestern Theological Seminary, Waco, Texas

The great Apostle to the Gentiles was at the close of his third missionary journey. On his first missionary journey he had taken the gospel to the island of Cyprus, the Roman province of Galatia (including Pisidia and Lycaonia), and to Pamphylia. On his second missionary journey he had evangelized Macedonia, Thessaly, and Achaia, preaching the gospel in the leading cities—Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens, and Corinth. On his third missionary journey he had evangelized the Roman province of Asia, especially the capital city Ephesus (though, doubtless, his corps of workers had evangelized the whole province and planted churches in the leading cities—Colossae, Laodicea, etc.). He had also revisited his European churches at Philippi, Corinth, and possibly Thessalonica. He had planned another missionary tour to extend as far west as Spain.²

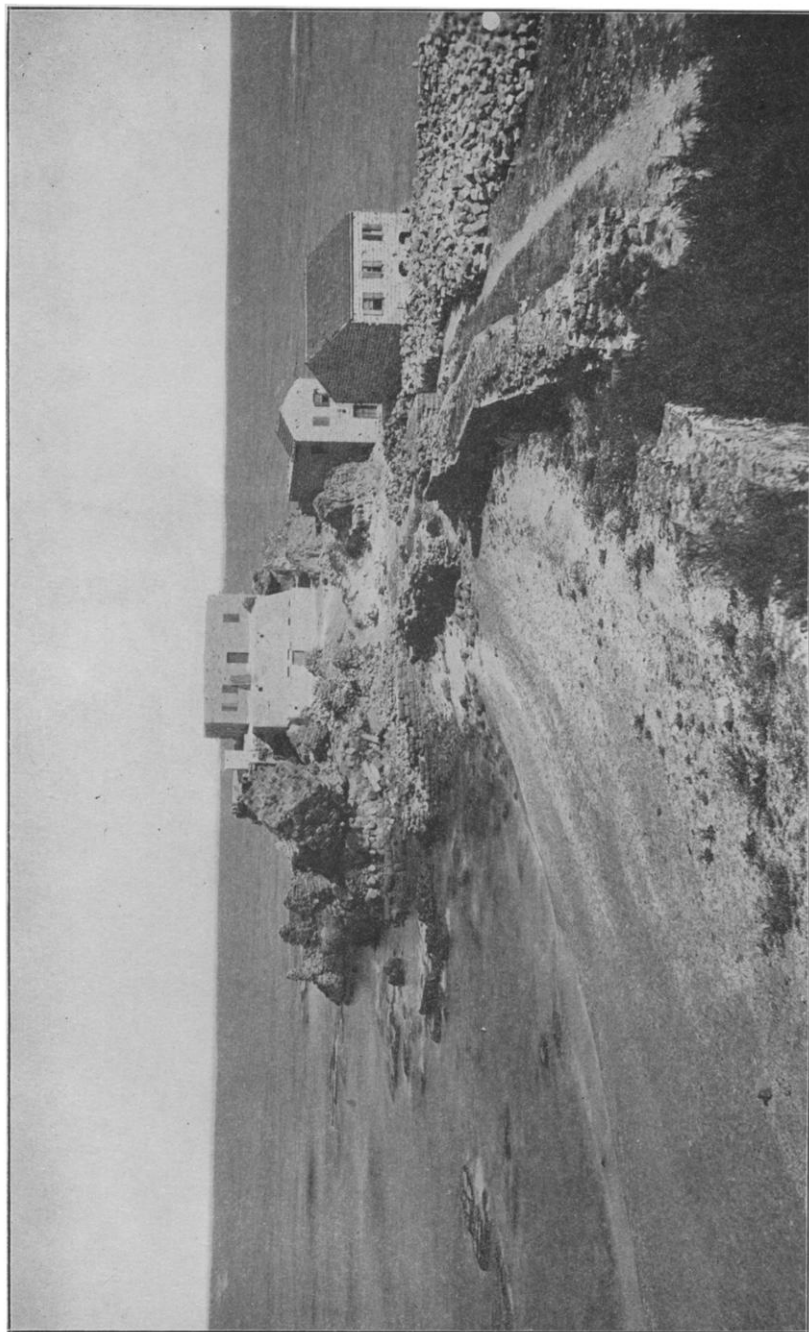
But now this hero of the gospel was approaching a crisis. While on his way to Jerusalem, to attend the Feast of Pentecost and to take the collection to his suffering Jewish brothers, the prophet Agabus met him at Caesarea and, by binding his own feet and hands with Paul's girdle, symbolically predicted that thus Paul should be bound at Jerusalem. But Paul was undaunted by this prediction of arrest and imprisonment. His heroic spirit replied, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." The prediction of Agabus came true. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and afterward taken by a Roman guard to Caesarea, the political capital where lived the procurator, for imprisonment.

THE SIGNIFICANCE ATTACHED TO PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT BY THE AUTHOR

It is remarkable that over one-fourth of the Book of Acts is devoted by the author to the telling of the story of Paul's imprisonment and

¹ This study covers the International Sunday School Lessons for October, 1909.

² Rom. 15:23.



THE MOLE OF CAESAREA, LOOKING SEAWARD

the events connected with it. The Book of Acts may be divided into four almost equal parts: first, chaps. 1-7, the history of the early church of Jerusalem; the second, chaps. 8-14, the beginnings of the spread of the gospel (by Philip, Peter, Barnabas, and Paul) among the gentiles; the third, chap. 15-21:26, the settlement of the question as to the conditions on which the gentiles should receive the gospel and the account of the great missionary career of Paul; the fourth, 21:27-chap. 28, the arrest and imprisonment of Paul.

But why should the author give as much space to the story of Paul's arrest and imprisonment as he did to telling the beginnings of the gospel among the gentiles, or to the whole missionary career of Paul? Does not this minute description of the imprisonment make the Book of Acts top-heavy as a literary production? This fact (the apparently undue proportion of space given to the imprisonment period of Paul's life) helps us to determine the purpose of the author in writing the Book of Acts. By describing this imprisonment in detail it gave him an opportunity to show the friendliness of Roman officials to Paul and Christianity. It is scarcely to be denied that this is a primary element in the purpose of the author. He has made prominent the friendliness of Roman officials in many places in the book before reaching the period of the imprisonment. In Cyprus, Sergius Paulus the proconsul becomes a believer;³ in Philippi, although the Roman magistrates scourged Paul and Silas and imprisoned them, they afterward released them with an apology for thus treating Roman citizens;⁴ in Corinth the proconsul Gallio dismissed the case against Paul;⁵ in Ephesus the asiarchs are friends to Paul;⁶ in the same city when Demetrius, by raising a mob, sought to have Paul condemned, the town-clerk, a Roman official next to the governor, vindicated Paul and his helpers and pronounced the attack upon them unjustifiable and illegal.⁷ So, we see, even outside the imprisonment account, the author apparently narrates those events which show the Roman government, not only not apprehensive of the spread of Christianity and of the influence of its missionaries, but friendly to the new religion. In these last chapters, those concerning the imprisonment, Paul meets three Roman officials, Lysias the military

³ Acts 13:12.

⁵ 18:12 ff.

⁷ 19:35 ff.

⁴ Acts 16:35 ff.

⁶ 19:31.

tribune (chiliarch), Felix and Festus, procurators. The first and last positively pronounced Paul innocent,⁸ while Felix shows Paul great favors and seems willing to set him free, if it had not been for his fear of the Jews and his hope of a bribe.⁹ So Paul was never condemned by a single Roman judge, though he remained in prison in Caesarea two years. Was it not, then, a part of the author's purpose so to present the facts of early Christianity, especially in the career of the great apostle, as to make his book an apology to Roman thinkers (Theophilus was probably a scholar) and officials? McGiffert and Ramsay¹⁰ both hold this view as to the purpose (although with shades of difference), which seems confirmed by the fact that the author has given us such a minute description of the period of imprisonment. Ramsay goes so far as to conjecture that Luke (whom he regards as the author of the Book of Acts) had planned to write a third book in which he purposed to describe the acquittal, release, and subsequent labors of Paul.

Most New Testament scholars hesitate to go as far as this. Yet, it is striking that the author closes his book without telling of Paul's execution. It is most probable that the book was written some time after the apostle's execution in Rome. Why, then, should the author not tell us about it? His silence suggests his purpose in writing, namely, to record the spread of Christianity in the early years so as to show its universality and even the friendliness of the Roman authorities toward Christianity in its progress throughout the empire.

PAUL'S LAST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

Let us consider more minutely the account in the Book of Acts. In 21:1-16, we have the account of Paul's journey from Miletus (where he addressed the elders from Ephesus) to Jerusalem. Why did Paul make this visit to Jerusalem? He had been warned by a prophet and urged by Christian friends not to go. Yet, he went. Why? We might reply in brief, "Because he felt it to be God's will." This would not be a satisfactory answer. In what sense was it God's will? It is suggested in Acts 20:16 that he wished to attend the Feast of Pentecost. But why should Paul, who had so much to say

⁸ 23:29 ff.; 25:25; 26:31.

⁹ 24:22 ff.

¹⁰ *St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen*, pp. 303 f.

against the formal institutions of Judaism, wish to attend Pentecost? We know that Pentecost was one of the great feasts of the Jews and was attended by thousands of Jews from foreign lands. It would thus give him an excellent opportunity to meet his Jewish brothers who had world-thoughts, that is, the Hellenistic Jews. Does this not suggest that the real purpose of Paul's visit to Jerusalem at this time was not simply to take the collection presented by the gentile Christians to their Jewish brothers in Judea, but to cement a closer union between the Palestinian Christians and those outside Palestine, whether Jews or gentiles? Why was Paul so diligent in procuring and presenting this offering made by the gentile Christians to their Jewish brothers in Christian faith? It seems unquestionable that he felt that this offering would be a bond to unite the disagreeing branches of Christianity. He knew that love was greater than faith or hope. He was of the opinion that this expression of love by the gentiles would win the hearts of the Jewish Christians.

But why should he go in person to take the offering? Perhaps he felt that his own personal influence might avail in averting the catastrophe predicted by Agabus. Again, he loved his own nation.¹¹ If this visit will win them to Christianity—especially the Pauline type of Christianity—he must make it at any cost, even if he must “die for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

We must pass over the section concerning the vow taken by Paul (21:17–26) inasmuch as it does not bear directly on the circumstances leading to Paul's arrest.

In Acts 21:27–22:29, we have the arrest of Paul recorded. At the end of the seven days of the Nazarite vow¹² the Jews from Asia (notice, it was not the Jews of Palestine) stirred up the multitude by shouting, “This is the man who teaches against the people, the law, and the temple, and even brought Greeks into the temple.” The people now became a mob and dragged Paul out of the temple. As soon as the chiliarch heard of the confusion he ran down upon them with the Roman soldiers, and when the Jews saw him coming they ceased beating Paul. The chiliarch asked what Paul had done.

¹¹ Rom. 9:3; 10:1.

¹² So Olshausen, Meyer, De Wette, Hackett, Wendt, etc., though Jäger, Baumgarten, Wieseler, Clemen, etc., think it means at the end of Pentecost.

Some shouted one thing, some another. But while the mob cried, "Away with him," the soldiers, to protect Paul from the violence of the mob, bore him on their shoulders on the stairway. Then Paul spoke to the chiliarch in Greek and the chiliarch asked, "Art thou not then the Egyptian, who before these days stirred up sedition and led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the assassins?" Paul resented the insinuation by replying, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen (Roman) of no mean city."

Why did the Roman tribune arrest Paul? Apparently to protect him from the violence threatened by the Jewish mob. But this question of the chiliarch suggests a deeper reason. He suspected that Paul was "the Egyptian" who had formerly raised an insurrection. It was his duty to keep down insurrection, and so he arrested Paul. According to Schürer,¹³ "rebellion became permanent" in Palestine under Felix. This accounts largely for the incarceration of Paul. As seen above, Lysias the chiliarch felt that Paul was innocent of the charges preferred against him by the Jews. But he must be cautious, and so he felt that he must keep in custody this suspect of insurrection. "The Egyptian" is referred to by Josephus in his *War* ii. 13. 5 and his *Antiquities* xx. 7. 6. His numbers of soldiers involved in the insurrection do not harmonize in the two passages, nor do they agree with the "four thousand" cited by the author of the Book of Acts. But the general condition of insurrection in Palestine at this time is well established in Josephus and other authorities. So we may well accept the historicity of these events connected with the circumstances leading to Paul's arrest.

In Acts 22:4-16, Paul tells, in Aramaic instead of Greek, which he usually spoke, his experience of conversion to Christianity. As compared with the two other accounts in the Book of Acts, 9:1-19a and 26:9-18, there are some grave differences as to details in the narratives. But these merely show the human element in the composition of the book and the different points of view. Paul emphasized the Ananias episode, that is, the coming of a disciple named Ananias to give him further light on Christianity and to baptize him. The author of Acts also emphasizes the Ananias episode in 9:1-19a, but he omits it from the account in 26:9-18.

¹³ *Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Div. I, Vol. II, p. 175.

At the close of the account of his conversion Paul is represented in Acts 22:17-21 as telling of a return to Jerusalem where he fell into a trance while praying in the temple, and heard the Lord Jesus commanding him to make haste and get out of Jerusalem, because the Jews would not receive his testimony concerning Jesus. (Wendt¹⁴ identifies this visit of Paul to Jerusalem with that in Gal. 1:18 f., but thinks the author of the Book of Acts supposed it to be that of Acts 9:26-30.) When the mob heard the recital of this vision they shouted, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live." But the chiliarch sought to find out Paul's crime by scourging him and compelling him to confess under torture. Paul waited quietly until the chiliarch had tied him with the thongs and then asked, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?" It frightened the chiliarch when he learned that Paul was Roman born.

On the next day the chiliarch commanded (notice the authority with which he speaks to the Jewish religious council) the Sanhedrin to meet for the hearing of Paul's case. The author tells¹⁵ how Paul shrewdly divided the Sanhedrin by claiming to be a Pharisee and a believer in the resurrection. The Pharisees stood for Paul and the Sadducees opposed him, and when the confusion in the Sanhedrin seemed to threaten Paul with violence, the chiliarch had soldiers to take him out by force.

The author records¹⁶ how on the next night the Lord cheered Paul in a vision and promised to let him testify for him in Rome. He then tells¹⁷ of the conspiracy of forty Jews who swore that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. To rescue Paul from the violence of this conspiracy (which was told to the chiliarch by Paul's nephew)¹⁸ the chiliarch had prepared two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen (the manuscripts being a little doubtful as to these figures) for the safe conduct of the apostle to Felix the governor at Caesarea. Lysias the chiliarch also sent a letter¹⁹ expressing his belief in Paul's inno-

¹⁴ *Apostelgeschichte*, 8. Aufl., S. 356.

¹⁵ 23:6 ff.

¹⁶ 23:1.

¹⁷ 23:12 ff.

¹⁸ 23:16 f.

¹⁹ 23:26-30. This letter is composed in a better Greek than the early chapters of Acts, but is similar to that of late chapters.

cence and stating that he was sending Paul to the procurator to preserve him from the Jew's plot and for the procurator himself to hear the charges against him.

TRIAL BEFORE FELIX

In chap. 25 we have the account of the trial before Felix the procurator, which took place five days after Paul's arrival in Caesarea. Felix was a freedman of the imperial family,²⁰ but was made procurator in Palestine because of his influence at the court of Emperor Claudius. Tacitus²¹ says of his rule, "With all manner of cruelty and lust he exercised royal functions in the spirit of a slave." Before the bar of such a man the apostle was first tried in Caesarea. An orator named Tertullus, a Roman advocate, shrewdly flattered the procurator by referring to the prosperity of his rule and charged Paul with insurrection. The apostle made his defense in reply, denying the charge of insurrection and told the procurator that it was only because he believed in the resurrection of the dead that the Sadducees were clamoring for his death.

It is to be noted that in this section of the Book of Acts²² Christianity is twice denominated "the Way."

But Felix had heard too much about Christianity to condemn Paul on the charges preferred by the Jewish elders through Tertullus. The expression,²³ "having more exact knowledge concerning the Way, etc.," is thought by Meyer, Hackett, Wendt (according to the original source) to express Felix' previous knowledge of Christianity, and not what he learned about it from Paul's accusers. So Felix ordered the centurion to keep the prisoner in custody, but allowed him to associate with friends who came to minister to him. During this time Paul preached to Felix and his wife Drusilla (who was a Jewess). The theme of his sermon was "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come." But Felix, though terrified by the preacher's denunciations of his injustice,²⁴ dismissed the prisoner for subsequent interviews. He even hoped to receive a bribe from the apostle for his release. He held him in bonds for two years, and

²⁰ Schürer, *Jewish People*, *loc. cit.*

²¹ *History*, v. 9.

²³ 24:22.

²² 24:14, 22.

²⁴ See Tacitus, *Annals*, 12:54.

on his deposition from office he left Paul still in bonds because he courted the favor of the Jews.

THE TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS—APPEAL TO CAESAR

This is recorded in Acts 25:1-12. Festus, three days after his arrival at Caesarea, went up to Jerusalem and the Jews clamored that he bring Paul up to Jerusalem for trial. They were plotting to kill him on the way. Festus did not consent to this procedure. In eight or ten days the procurator returned to Caesarea and summoned Paul before his court. The Jerusalem Jews preferred many charges (probably insurrection and blasphemy against the temple were the chief) which the apostle denied.²⁵ But Festus was a politic man (though this quality is not mentioned in Josephus' *Antiq.* ii. 8 and in his *War*, ii. 14) and wishing to please the Jews asked Paul if he would go up to Jerusalem and be tried there. The apostle refused to do so and appealed to Caesar.

Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? Perhaps McGiffert²⁶ has put it too strongly when he assumes that Paul appealed to Caesar because he felt that his enemies had a strong case against him. They really seem not to have had a strong case against him. But Paul knew that he could not get justice in Jerusalem among his enemies and he began to feel also that the new procurator Festus would not give him justice. Hence his only recourse was to appeal to the imperial court at Rome. This he did.

But before Paul left Caesarea for Rome, Agrippa II²⁷ with his sister Bernice visited Caesarea to congratulate Festus on his introduction into the procuratorship. Festus seized this opportunity to obtain the opinion of the king concerning Paul the prisoner, and so had his case laid before Agrippa.²⁸ Thus the missionary hero appeared before the dignitaries of the Herodian kingdom. He impressed Agrippa that he was an innocent man, though Festus appears to have been impressed that Paul was a man of culture who had become fanatical on the subject of religion. But Festus, too, probably shared the king's impression that Paul was innocent,²⁹

²⁵ 25:8 f.

²⁶ *Apostolic Age*, p. 354.

²⁷ Son of Herod Agrippa I, whose death is recorded in Acts 12:23, who became king in 50 A. D., and lived till ca. 100 A. D.

²⁸ 25:13—26:32.

²⁹ 25:25-27.

for he wanted the king to give his opinion of Paul, that he might have something definite to write the emperor as to the charges against the prisoner.

THE VOYAGE TO ROME AND THE SHIPWRECK

The account of this voyage comes exclusively from the "we" source and is regarded as possessing full credibility. Paul sailed in a ship of Adramyttium along the coast of Palestine as far as Sidon. The ship then put to sea and sailed west of Cyprus into Myra (a few miles southeast of Ephesus). Paul was under the charge of Julius, a Roman centurion who treated him kindly. At Myra Julius transferred the prisoner to a ship of Alexandria which was about to sail for Italy. They sailed nearly west for a few miles between some of the Aegean islands, then turned southwest, passing to the south of Crete. Paul advised that the ship winter in Fair Havens (a south port of Crete), but the captain, influenced by Julius, sailed northwest to Phenix (another port of Crete). The wind blew so softly that they thought there was no danger, and so put to sea westward. But a tremendous storm came down upon the ship before they had passed the island of Cauda. They cast the freight and equipment from the ship and let her drive before the wind in the sea of Adria for fourteen days. Paul was encouraged by the Lord to believe that no life aboard should be lost, and cheered the crew and passengers with his optimism. The two hundred and seventy-six souls escaped from the sinking ship to the island of Melita to the south of Sicily. Here Paul was kindly treated by the barbarians (natives) and healed the father of Publius the chief man on the island. After three months Julius and Paul sailed in another ship of Alexandria by Syracuse and Rhegium up to Puteoli on the coast a few miles southeast of Rome. Here Christian brothers entertained Paul and then he set out with Julius to Rome. He was met at Appii Forum by brothers from Rome who welcomed him to the capital city. So Paul reached Rome at last, but as a prisoner to be tried at the emperor's court.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S LATE CAREER

We cannot here discuss the difficult problem of the chronology of the Apostolic Age. We will give a mere résumé of the principal dates in the apostle's late career which is covered in this article. He

finished the third missionary journey and arrived in Jerusalem where he was arrested at Pentecost in 58 A. D. (possibly as early as 57) that is, about the last of May, 58. He remained prisoner in Caesarea two years.³⁰ About the close of these two years Felix was recalled and Festus became procurator. Kellner, Weber, McGiffert, etc., place the removal of Felix as early as 54 or 55 A. D. but most New Testament scholars still follow the old date, about 60 A. D., which rests on the fact that Josephus places almost all the events of Felix' procuratorship under the reign of Nero (that is, after 54) and the fact (as stated by Josephus) that he held the office several years under Nero.

Paul sailed from Caesarea in the summer of 60 A. D., reached Crete by October (Day of Atonement), and fourteen days later escaped to Melita where he spent the winter. In the spring of 61 he sailed for Rome, reaching there about April. Here he remained "two whole years"³¹ as a prisoner, but living in his own hired dwelling under guard of a Roman soldier. This would bring us to April, 63 A. D. Was he executed at this time? Probably not; it seems more likely that he was released and went on a fourth missionary journey, perhaps visiting as far west as Spain and revisiting Asia, Crete, and Greece. He was arrested again and taken to Rome for trial. This time he was condemned to be beheaded, about 64 or 65 A. D. (maybe later).³²

As to the imprisonment letters, Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians,³³ they were probably written during the imprisonment in Rome, as is held by most New Testament scholars, not in Caesarea, as is held by a few. If Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles (as has been held almost universally) he wrote First Timothy and Titus during his last (fourth) missionary journey and in his subsequent imprisonment in Rome just before his martyrdom he wrote Second Timothy.³⁴

³⁰ Acts 24: 27.

³¹ Acts 28: 30.

³² See Schürer, *op. cit.*, Div. I, Vol. II, pp. 182-84 for the various views as to the date of Paul's execution.

³³ Many New Testament critics deny that Paul wrote Colossians and Ephesians.

³⁴ Many recent New Testament scholars deny that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles, as they now stand. Jülicher, Harnack, and McGiffert think they came from a later hand, but are founded on genuine Pauline letters.